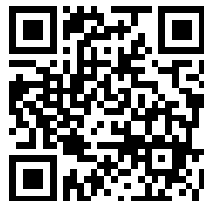

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Compliments of Martin Schütze

GUSTAV FREYTAG

Theorist of the Drama and Playwright

By
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The University
of Chicago

ack.

Mrs. Fiske Kimball

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GUSTAV FREYTAG, THEORIST OF THE DRAMA AND PLAYWRIGHT.



LESS than two generations separate us from the dramatic and dramaturgic activity of Gustav Freytag, which extends from 1841 to 1863, the year of his "Technique of the Drama," and yet it is almost impossible even now to bridge the gap. Freytag, an empiricist, like Aristotle in a larger measure, undertook, at the close of an era in the moral and aesthetic history of mankind, to fit a dramatic theory to ideas that had already received their cues for their final exits. There is a peculiar, pathetic significance in the fact that Darwin's "Origin of Species" appeared in 1859, the year of Freytag's last drama, which marks the beginning of his serious work on the "Technique." Darwin's conclusions, supplemented by the systematic, sociological generalizations of Spencer, brought about a revolution in our views of the organic meaning, the origin, and the ethical valuations of character; of the relations between man, and

nature, society, and his own individual concerns; of the mainsprings of action, of spontaneity, variety and predetermined constancy of impulses, aptnesses, and natural bents: a revolution which ended by overturning all traditional ethical notions concerning will and responsibility, guilt and fated helplessness, original merit and mere favoritism of fortune. A new literary creed quickly overgrew the forgotten remnants of the old. Zola, hardly fifteen years after Freytag's "Technique," began to elaborate in his great essays, which were somewhat later published as "Le Roman Expérimental," "Le Naturalisme au Théâtre," and also "Mes Haines," the literary theory and technique of naturalism. This theory has suffered few restrictions and extensions on its march through the civilized nations. It has rather recently, in a somewhat timid and mitigated form, invaded America. But signs are not wanting that we too, for a time at least, shall receive our unstinted share of it.

As we survey the principal literary eras of the past from a present naturalistic point of view we are profoundly impressed by the observation that the gulf separating us from Freytag and his era is wider and deeper than that intervening between Shakespeare and the drama of classical Greek antiquity. The verse form and certain formal conventions aside, which are of less significance than they seem to those unacquainted with them, there is more community of spirit in the essential understanding of the organic relations of the individual to his environment; a closer bond among Shakespeare, the Greeks, and the philosophy of life gradually emerging from the theory of evolution, and alas! mostly submerged in the efforts of our stages; than between us and the time of Gustav Freytag.

The situations, customs, standards, the types and ideas, of Freytag's time are not merely parts of the past, but they are obsolete, sloughed off by the past. They have not achieved the classic reality that rises above the mortuary plane of change and decay, but have about them that painful, sordid meanness of cast-off garments, that faded dowdiness of discarded fashions, which depress and repel our sense of life, not because they are musty, or useless, or threadbare, but because they unite in a complex and insistent symbolism of decay.

What are the peculiarities of the spirit of Freytag's age in Germany, or at least, of its embodiment in Freytag, that impart to it in the judgment of our age that flaw in the grain, futility? Freytag belonged to the generation of young German students who originated and upheld the progressive liberalism which aimed at a republic, and culminated and failed in the revolution of 1848. Their creed was a composite of the social egalitarianism of the French July Revolution, of English political liberalism, of the remnants of the subjective individualism of German Romanticism, and of the nationalistic German idealism that had its birth in the war against Napoleon. They had a complete programme of a united German Republic of free and equal citizens. The Revolution failed. The stronger and more uncompromising spirits of it were incarcerated; and many of them, among them the greatest genius the movement produced, Karl Schurz, ultimately came to the United States, where they played important parts in settling the Middle West, in supporting Lincoln, and in fighting for the Union. But the great majority accepted defeat and were ultimately content to regard the political unification of Germany in the Empire after the French war as the

fulfillment of an essential part of their early dreams. The ideal of political freedom gave way before that of nationalism. The nationalistic passion was real, the democratic passion was, with most of those men, chiefly a doctrine, an intellectual interest.

In the "Student," his second play, a one-act tragedy, Freytag reveals the ineffective, purely doctrinaire character of that liberalism. As a play, the work is of no significance. It has almost no action, no characterization, no conflict, and lacks reality. A student, a librarian in a noble family, is hopelessly in love with the lady of the house. A university friend, the manager of a democratic newspaper, appears, offering him the editorship of the paper. The student declines, preferring to remain near his beloved. He soon finds, however, that his situation is impossible, and leaves in despair for a dark destination which, as far as we can see, may be death by suicide, or gradual ruin among the dispossessed, or some other grievous end. The interesting part of the play is contained in a number of long speeches in which Walter, the student, meets the arguments of his friend, the journalist, whom he at the beginning humorously characterizes thus: . . . "You are a journalist; statesman in front; behind, a *sans-culotte*." His friend is a real man of the people who demands that everyone should be "in the stress of Time, where new things are taking shape"; that he should "help in leading the present into new channels." Walter replies, in his most significant passage: "Before you teach others, immerse yourself in the people (I translate literally) and learn what makes a man strong. Confine yourself to the scope of the least of your fellows, then enlarge his wants, his powers. Ennoble his work-

shop for him, consecrate his field and garden for him; swing the hammer, take hold of the spade, make a man of each one individually in his own circle among his familiar tasks—thus the people will gradually and spontaneously ripen toward manhood. That is my creed!" Romberg, his friend, accuses him of lack of conviction, adding: "The God of the Present will deny you as you deny him!" Walter retorts: "The rightful champion of freedom is he alone that always honors the freedom of the individual," and warns him that his ideas will lead to tyranny, disorder, and misery. He calls him one of the many "preachers in the desert who proclaim light and pass into darkness."

To Freytag and his contemporaries, the detached individual is the ultimate fact of social life. This conception, which survives to this day in the legal systems that trace their origin from English law, was soon displaced in literature by Naturalism, the child of evolutionary biology and sociology. To the modern naturalistic mind as it is trying to find expression in literature, and especially in the drama, the individual appears rather more as the combined result than as a separate cause, of the operation of social forces. The individual, in modern literature, is represented as an organic and integral part of the whole social structure. The early Mid-Nineteenth Century Individualism seems to us blind, empty, and fatuous.

There is still another element in Freytag's individualism which prevented it from entering as a quickening force into the modern world. This world, Industrialism, to the first generation of which Freytag belonged, is distinguished chiefly by a completely changed utilization of the abilities and allegiances of the individual. It has developed with

amazing rapidity and adroitness a system of co-operative groups, ever growing in extent, complexity, and organic assimilation, in which the individual has ceased to be the measure and centre of effort and achievement. The former standards of efficiency, of civic virtue, of loyalty to ideals, have all been subjected to the group test and modified in accordance with it. The old man-to-man morality has been enlarged into a community morality. Ethics was retail and has become wholesale. The passage quoted above from "The Student" beginning: "Before you teach others" . . . shows that Freytag was incapable of understanding the new communistic trend of morality. He belonged by tradition, by disposition, by habits of mind, and by deliberate choice, to the middle class, the bourgeoisie, of the early nineteenth century, the class of the honest, industrious artisan, sober, persistent, self-reliant, responsible; but also narrow, unprogressive, prosy, and rather smug, and above all, incapable of a high-minded subordination of his traditional and personal interests, prejudices, and standards, to a larger and less personal conception of virtue. Its ideal was respectability, the morality that pays its bills. If we take that element of respectability, that solvent virtue, from the leading characters of his work, they collapse like empty sacks.

To these characters he opposes, in his two social-political plays, "Madame Valentine" (1846), and "Count Waldemar" (1847), the privileged class, the hereditary, agrarian aristocracy. His noblemen are as a rule distinguished by frivolity, arrogance, careless dissipation, and an irresponsible egoism, in their dealings with the lower class, and especially the female members of it. They always succumb in the

end, by defeat or acceptance, and usually both, to the righteous philistines who have droned their stale uncomprehending morality, their never-ending faith in the wisdom of untold generations of mean obscurity: "Never show your head and you will not be hit," through many monotonous scenes, until they have become intolerably odious. In "Madame Valentine" he introduces in the person of Saalfeld the "raisonneur" of the French play of the time, a forerunner of Count Trask in Sudermann's "Honor," to give a certain external justification and a lighter ironic touch to many moral platitudes. His aristocrats are not real. The roystering young bloods have nothing of the force of the Shakespearean hot-heads but are really quite harmless doubles of the very sons of tradespeople, whose tame dullness they affect to despise in language that tries in vain to hide, under tasteless and outlandish exaggerations and metaphors, the banality of its ideas.

Freytag lacked passion, the great imaginative passion that drives a large action to its necessary conclusion by an inherent force of character and temperament, which, no matter how destructive and terrible, in the drama is supreme.

He had not the tragic vision, the simplicity of comprehension, that readily sifts the trivial and transient from the primary forces of life. As a result his dramas and tragedies are without an inherent principle of motion. He had to look about for an external machinery to keep his characters going, and he found it in the intrigue play of Scribe. The two political plays already mentioned do not move by an inner force, but by an external contrivance. There is no atmosphere, no progress of action, no reality, but merely a succession of theatrical situations, the

emptiness and temperamental woodenness of which are thinly varnished over with a monotonous bonhomie and gently ironic sententiousness.

Years later, 1859, he published his fourth and last serious drama, "The Fabians," a tragedy in prosy verse, in which he tried to give to his favorite political conflict the traditional setting of high tragedy. The central idea, an arrogant hereditary aristocracy succumbing heroically to an equally arrogant, and a corrupt, mob of ludicrous bonhomie that is called the Roman Democracy, challenges immediately comparison with Shakespeare's "Coriolanus" and promptly dies of it.

He had a certain ready wit, however, a certain sober, upright, deliberate sense of the ordinary values of life, that Mrs. Grundy gift of sweeping out obvious affectations and insincerities, which surprises and delights when it is used sparingly. Everyone likes to meet Mrs. Grundy now and then, but one needs to have his line of retreat clear. One enjoys her most as an unobserved witness passing her open window, or her doorstep, or other casual scenes of her ingenious militancy. But who would wish to board with her, or be backed up by her against her mantel piece for three or four hours at a stretch? And who would have her weep on his shoulder, or have her systematically unfold her scheme of a perfect conduct of life? And still worse, who would wish to be adopted into her relentlessly complacent and very numerous family embodying various degrees of innocuous bonhomie and purring ineffectiveness?

Freytag's four serious plays have all disappeared from the stage. Of his two comedies, the first, "The Bridal Journey, or Kunz von der Rosen," with which he began his career as a writer of plays, was a fail-

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"Mr. Schütze has, in fact, written a remarkably forceful and dramatic rendering of the old story. . . . The most notable achievement of the author lies in his humanization of both Judith and Holofernes."—*Providence, R.I., Journal*.

ure from the beginning. It is a conventional, romantic composition, having for its subject the courtship and wedding of Emperor Maximilian and Maria of Burgundy. It can hardly be called a play. It consists of a number of strange situations, with an almost complete assortment of conventional romantic characters, as a prince of supernatural virtue and prowess, a clown, gypsies, rogues, a gigantic knight, and minstrels. There is hardly an attempt at character drawing and construction, and much forced vagabond humor and lusty good nature, which already points to the pudgy good nature of his later worthy burghers.

His fame as a dramatist rests on his remaining play, "The Journalists," a comedy in four acts, which appeared in 1853. The enduring interest of the play arises from a certain blithe warmth of its sentiments, from the quickness and unity of movement and action, from the social comprehensiveness of its plan, from its clear cut, if rather typical characters, from the terseness and vivacity of the dialogue and a pervading quality of urbane irony in which lightness of touch blends with a certain secure and affectionate sense of family solidarity. The audience is not made to feel as an invader or detached onlooker, but is promptly invited into the circle and thenceforth quietly accepted as a full member of the family. The principal action proceeds between three groups, consisting of the journalistic staff of the "Union," a progressive newspaper, the editor of which, Professor Oldendorf, is the progressive candidate for representative in the "Chamber," or lower house, in the impending election of instructed delegates; of the opposing, reactionary paper, bearing the significant title of "Coriolan"; and of the household of a retired Colonel of the army, Berg, and Ida, his

daughter. There is a subsidiary plot involving Konrad Bolz, assistant editor of the "Union," and Adelheid Runeck, a wealthy friend of Ida Berg, who visits the latter, and as lady bountiful, lovely machine goddess, and faithful, capable, affectionately humorous lover disentangles all the complications and captures the "Union," together with its staff, and particularly, not solely for editorial purposes, Dr. Bolz. The characters, if somewhat conventional, are well defined and offer a pleasing variety. Oldendorf, the lover of Ida, is the least attractive, unfortunately. He is one of Freytag's most trying types of superior bonhomie, as Piepenbrink, the wine dealer, and his family belong to the type of simple bonhomie. They are so guileless, the one in his absolutely antiseptic virtue, the other in his poodle-like naïveté, that one is relieved whenever they make room for the other characters. The old retired colonel, kindly, crusty, devoted to his daughter and her fiancé, absorbed in the breeding of dahlias, who is gradually inveigled into the political fight until he becomes the candidate of the party opposing Oldendorf, is well drawn. He is completely ignorant, with the brass-bound, passionate ignorance of the military man, of public affairs. He thinks he is calm, objective, superior to the vexations of political strife and personal vanity, but whenever the slightest opportunity offers, he stumbles into the most obvious traps. The climax occurs when he is defeated. He breaks with Oldendorf, and it takes a whole act of pleasant, crafty, respectful, and yet slightly disciplinary cajoling to bring him to his senses. There is a touch of the neighborliness, the affectionate fellowship of the old-fashioned German town in the coddling of the old man, by his neighbors; the action is steeped in a loyal assurance that his folly, even

though great and public, has not really injured the esteem and respect in which he is held by his fellow citizens; a mellow humanity, that, if it does seem at times a little parochial, yet lays upon one's severer feelings the mitigating touch of happy warmth which is of the soul of true comedy.

Bolz is the typical, romantic university man of Freytag's generation. He combines dash with sentiment, high spirit with a sober steadfastness, kindness with an irresistible gift of mischief, apparent wildness and frivolity with an affectionate and gentle seriousness. He must have his fun, but he always acts properly in the end. He belongs to one of the most popular types of the comedies of all nations, the young man who under the motley wears a heart of oak, and vainly (for we are penetrating, indeed, we, the audience!) endeavors to silence the accents of noble purposes in the boisterous waggings of his tongue. But he is attractive. He is bright and quick. And if the glitter of his speech is not always gold, and if the gold in it is often well-worn, yet there are enough brightness, energy, and wit left to make him attractive. Bellmaus, the innocent, the author of one book of verse (Freytag had also in his youth written a book of verse which never recovered from the shock of publication!), Bellmaus—the name is well chosen!—the male ingénu, blushing like a school girl; and Schmock, the poor battered general utility man of the “Coriolanus” office, who speaks the Jewish dialect, are somewhat farcical, but fill the picture fittingly.

Freytag, in the preface to his “Technique,” defined the subject of the highest type of comedy as “the jovial and humorous presentation of limited emotions, wills, and actions, which surpasses the mere anecdote of domestic life and treats larger spheres of human

interests. Not until the weakness of rulers, the political philistinism of the city man, the arrogance of the nobility, all the numerous social malformations of our time, have found a gay and competent expression on the stage, can we hope for a comprehensive technical discussion of comedy."

High comedy portrays limitations of character, volition, action, and motion, and it does so in types which represent, broadly and fittingly, the principal social characteristics of an historic era. It is distinguished from high tragedy in this respect that the latter seeks out, in the first place, not the limitations, but rather the opposite, the positive side of character, the heroic possibilities of mankind. Tragedy must transcend the estimates and judgments of separate periods of history, it must find a more universal environment than comedy can. It requires a larger perspective, and a less literal sense of reality than comedy does.

Very few modern plays had appeared up to Freytag's time,—and fewer have since—that could measure up to his definition of the highest form of comedy. Molière had created classic embodiments of the prevailing shortcomings of the most conspicuous social class below the rank of the exempt, in the time of Louis XIV. Freytag probably had him in mind in forming his idea of comedy. Sheridan's comedies, in England, and, though in a much less degree, Lessing's "*Minna von Barnhelm*" and Kleist's "*The Broken Jug*," in Germany, meet his tests. Even Goldoni, however, with his rollicking rogues and delightful vivacity, approaches too closely to farce to join the group of the elect. Nor can Freytag's own "*Journalists*" be included among the great comedies of the world. The play really has very little social perspective. For the satiric gen-

eral idea underlying the whole action is not sufficiently true to actual historic conditions, being on the whole a rather bizarre exaggeration of minor features of it; the idea, that is, that Freytag's contemporaries were too provincial to distinguish between an objective conflict of political principles and petty personal animosity. Old Colonel Berg, a representative of a narrow class rather than of the body of society, can hardly carry the burden of the intended satiric generalization. Nor are the other characters social types in the sense of Freytag's definition, but types from a limited, and not, after all, even moderately representative circle of middle class Society, with a capital initial. His people, if we look closely, are not really social, but purely domestic types, who have been dragged against their wills from the pleasant and obscure privacy of their four walls out upon the market place, where they are very self-conscious and uncomfortable, and act a little like fastidious domestic cats on a wet floor.

“THE TECHNIQUE OF THE DRAMA.”

It was as a theorist of the drama that Freytag won an eminent and international reputation. His “Technique of the Drama,” published in 1863, attained an immediate fame and has to a certain extent maintained for nearly two generations its position as a standard text book of dramatic construction. The theoretic value of the book lies in its sober empirical method, the systematic arrangement and the richness and theoretic completeness of its material and conclusions, the pleasant clearness and definiteness of its statements, and a sense of finality without suggestion of dogmatic narrowness or pedantry, which give satisfaction to one's intellectual sense of

order and thoroughness and love of form. The "Technique" leaves one with a clear and graphic image of the drama as a highly organized and symmetrical architectural structure, every essential part of which is definitely set forth and described; standardized as it were, and related to every other part.

This formal vision of the drama produces a peculiar effect of simplicity. It seems very easy to put together play upon play after this model, just as it would be easy to build house after house when one has mastered all the structural parts of a model house. And it is in this formal completeness and finality that is hidden the fatal flaw in the entire theory.

The fault of the "Technique" is its externalism. To Freytag the drama is not a living organism that moves by a spontaneous inner force, but a cunning mechanical contrivance, every motion of which depends upon a push from some outside force. It is, to him, a game of skill played upon an intricate, pre-arranged ground plan with a number of pawns that are advanced by the dramatist against his adversary, the alert audience, strictly in accordance with such rules of craft and strategic procedure as are permissible between gentlemen. Coups and surprises are parts of the game; the more complex, the better, provided they do not overtax the collective powers of concentration arrayed against the dramatist, from gallery to floor. But even the grand coups, the catastrophes and denouements, must be fair. They must be properly prepared for, hinted at, not too bluntly, in deference to the more alert and initiated members of the audience, nor too diffusedly or faintly, that the less sophisticated may not stray in the wilderness of uncertainty and disgust.

Freytag had this external sense of mechanical

composition to a high degree, as "The Journalists" shows. He had the necessary dramatic gift of visualizing well defined stage situations, of assembling the separate parts of each situation into a compact theatrical "effect," and of introducing a striking contrast into a scene at the points where attention began to flag. He differentiated his characters strictly according to a carefully laid scheme of relative importance and sympathetic appeal, and he had a clever way of preparing telling departures in the action, especially in the cases of humorous inconsistencies of characters at the very moments when they most approved of themselves. Several lapses of this kind suffered by Colonel Berg in "The Journalists," are among the best and most comic bits of the play.

The first two-thirds of the "Technique" are devoted to the "Dramatic Action," "Structure of the Drama," and "Structure of the Scenes." They are followed by a chapter on dramatic characters. Almost every student of the drama probably is familiar with Freytag's analysis and graphic diagram of the dramatic structure. In the ideal drama the first act should contain the introduction, exposition, the "initial impulse" of the action, and the beginning of intensification. The action should become amplified and intensified in the second and third acts until it reaches the climax near the end of the third act. The last two are the acts of descending action. Since, however, a prolonged descent would be uninteresting, it is necessary to inject into it, somewhere in the fourth act, a new situation or incident, the "incident of final suspense," after which the catastrophe is due. This incident must not be foreign to the ascending action, but derived from some part of it. The entire arrangement is graphically shown by

a triangular diagram, the apex of which corresponds to the climax of the play, and various marks and kinks in it, to the different steps of the action.

At some point in the upslope of the diagram the "tragic impulse" enters. The conditions and precise location of its entrance are left vague. Freytag's idea is that the tragic character of a drama has to wait for its final definition in the minds of the audience and author until the irruption of an external disturbing force into the even neutrality of the action, resembling the casting of a stone into a placid pool. From that moment everything is changed. The audience, if it has enough theatrical logic, knows that there can be only one conclusion to the clever contrivance and is proud in the assurance of its expert sagacity.

The outcome of the action must be the "catastrophe" which in its technical meaning may include both the happy and the disastrous endings. The term is to a certain extent, particularly in the theme play, synonymous with the "dénouement" of the French play of intrigue. The catastrophe must be so devised that it brings about a "catharsis," a purging in the minds of the audience.

The deadly formalism of it! The action of a drama is not like the roof of a barn, but a rich and complicated event. Freytag's diagram can touch only the least important parts of a drama, its external mechanism; and those who rely on the easy and empty symbolism of it promptly acquiesce in a false sense of knowledge. The diagram, the whole formalism of the scheme, is worse than no interpretation because it forestalls true interpretation and understanding of first dramatic principles. A drama is not like a pseudo-geometric problem, it is not like architecture of any kind, for the first characteristic

of it is that it moves. It consists of spontaneous human emotions and passions, purposes and impulses, suffering and joy, guilt and virtue, the infinitely various manifestations of character in many phases of conflict, victory, and defeat. This spontaneous life must be confined within certain limits of plot or "idea," to be sure, but "plot" and "idea" are merely the negative conditions of statement; their chief purpose consists in giving the fullest opportunities to the characters; they must derive their justification from the characters. Furthermore, the action of the characters composing a play—I am speaking of high drama, as Freytag does—does not follow a thin line of geometric calculation, but it must constantly gather force, intensity, volume, impetus, until it breaks through every opposing force and obstacle, and spreads its tide of ruin or happiness over a wide region. In a well constructed drama the effects, the sequence of events, the grouping, the preparations, the retardations and accelerations, the turns, the pauses, the interruptions and suspensions, all the resources that make action rich and interesting, will be found, but the essential difference between such a drama and the makeshift of Freytag's "Technique" is that while in the latter they are mere shifts, mere tricks of the trade, mere conjuror's contrivances to create "illusion," that is, to create a pseudo-reality, to disguise the lifeless emptiness of the thing from the audience; in the former, these diversities and sequences respond, sincerely and naturally, to the spontaneous changes which determine the course of passions, impulses, and emotions, and which insinuate themselves promptly into the kindred minds of the dramatist and his audience.

The dramatic action is a dynamic process which

determines the form, and not a merely static device. The conclusion, the "catastrophe," is the inevitable result of that dynamic process, and not a thesis, a proposition, laid down at the beginning, which predetermines every detail of "action" and structure. And the ultimate, the moral, aim of the great drama, the purging of the soul of the audience, is not to enforce a mere shallow, moralizing logic, or prescription, but to free the mind from its ordinary preoccupations, petty, narrowing, dogmatic, and prepare it for a profound comprehension of great moral forces, rather than for the instilling of premeditated moral dogmas. The mechanical catharsis is like doing sums in elementary arithmetic. The real purging of the soul produces a large and inspired sense both of the intelligible forces of life and of those that pass understanding. It offers awed and exalted intimations of the divine grandeur of life rather than a neat package of moral precepts, like mint tablets after a course dinner.

The "Technique" teaches how to imitate the empty shell of a dramatic action, hoping by the minuteness and cunning of the falsification, the "illusion," to trick the audience out of the perception of the hollowness, the spiritual fraudulency, of it, at least until the end of the play. It does not discuss the art of the drama but the trade of theatricalism.

Freytag's immediate inspiration did not come from the great models which he deliberately set about analyzing, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Schiller, and Goethe, but from—Scribe, the master of the intrigue play. Scribe, too, knew how to place his figures on the board, and he, too, did not know how to make them move. His figures also were all made of wood and wires, and not of flesh and nerves, and he also was too busy with the external semblance of

motion to perceive the difference. As Freytag's plays are intrigue plays, with a motor apparatus of wires, so his "Technique" is the theory of the intrigue play.

It would be unjust, however, to dispose of Freytag's "Technique" as a mere text book of the school of Scribe. If it had not another more permanent basis besides the art of Scribe, its vitality would be unexplainable. The real and enduring substance of it is derived from the fact that its foundations reach down to the father of all conventional dramatic theory, Aristotle himself. The "Technique" is essentially the completion and final modern restatement of Aristotle's fragmentary theory in the "Poetics." Nothing essential can be added to it, and the inaccuracies and omissions are so few and unimportant that there is no reason why the work should not live when and wherever the aesthetic philosophy of Aristotle persists.

As one must measure Freytag by Aristotle, so Aristotle must be measured by Freytag. If we accept Aristotle we must accept Freytag, and also Scribe; if we reject Scribe and Freytag, we must also reject Aristotle.

The conclusion thus reached opens a very large and inviting path into the history of dramatic theory, and it becomes necessary to venture a little way into it. It would be futile, as well as unjust, to attempt an estimate of Freytag's work without facing clearly, if very briefly, the Aristotelian implication.

Aristotle, an awe-inspiring name! But, however important his externalism may be in other subjects, in his essay on poetry it is reduced to an insubstantial formalism. The emptiness of his formulations stares from every paragraph. And yet it is very difficult to define his inadequacy. It is not easy to

exhibit absent qualities. His generalizations are so wide, so all-inclusive, and so objective, so completely smooth and featureless, so devoid of specific significance, that they accommodate the most heterogeneous substances. This featureless spaciousness gives them a tremendous prestige, for whatever objection one may urge against them, there is always room in their vast vacuity for the objection together with the thing antagonized. It is a logical paradise in which the lion lies down with the lamb, and the elephant fears not the mouse. One cannot attack theories, the largeness of which consists in their negativity, by trying to fill them so full of substance that they burst. They are as elastic as air. But they are also as indiscriminating as the air. Their very mock universality betrays their insufficiency, and becomes narrowness. If the theories of Aristotle fit Sophocles equally with Scribe, Freytag equally with Shakespeare, that very condition proves that they rest not on essential, but on trivial, matters, that they embrace the common-places of life and the theatre in general, and not the specific realities determining the character of each one dramatic poet. The result is that with every new significant factor entering into the sum of things that offer themselves for consideration, the Aristotelian method of generalization becomes less, instead of more, significant. It proceeds toward the negative pole of knowledge, by eliminating all specific elements, instead of assimilating them. It becomes less the more it increases. It merely stretches. It does not grow.

One example from the "Poetics" may serve to show both the essential fault in Aristotle's teaching and the identity of it with that of Freytag. Aristotle discusses at some length, for him, the relative importance of the plot, which he calls also structure of

incidents, and of character, in the drama. He comes to the conclusion that the former is the "soul of tragedy," "character holds second place." This means that the characters in a drama are determined by the mechanical scheme of it. The necessary consequence is that his conception of character is mechanical also. Spontaneity is compatible only with primacy of character within the structure of the drama. Aristotle's interpretations of Sophocles are as wooden as are Freytag's of Shakespeare.

The significance of Freytag's "Technique," however, extends not only back to the beginning of dramatic theory, but down to the present day as well. It applies, almost to every minute detail, to the latest type of the contemporary thesis play, the plays of Hervieu, in France. The sole conspicuous contemporary innovation has been due to the naturalistic demand that characters should not, as Aristotle and Freytag demand, be a little above the average, but within or below it. But this is a mere detail of attribution, altering nothing in the entire theory of structure, of means of characterization, and of the technical relations between the different parts. The reason for this unimpaired validity of the "Technique" lies in the fact that the thesis play, which in spite of elaborate efforts of distinction, is essentially identical with the problem play, is the direct descendant of the intrigue play of Scribe, and ultimately of Aristotle-Freytag's theory. It betrays its origin by its mechanical facility, superficial clarity, and false order; its monotony, lack of spontaneity and of characterization; its externalism, confusion of mere argumentative excitement with genuine passion, and of theatrical effectiveness with dramatic force. The thesis play has everything pertaining to drama except its life. It is static, and

stops the moment the manipulator lets go of the wires. It is dead, a corpse from which both the sensory and motor systems have been removed, the petrified remains of an extinct dramatic organism.

It is strange that the technique of the drama should generally be confounded with the mere external machinery of theatricalism. In discussing the technique of the novel it would occur to no one that understands the novel, to separate the mere external aspect of it from the inner forces of character and emotion which determine the external parts of structure and style. Diagramming is a very rudimentary method in the study of the novel. As to style, to be sure, there are many good people who believe that there is one absolutely best style for all forms of prose. They understand all the negative parts of form, but none of the positive qualities. Nor would any one, not a hopeless formalist, believe that the technical qualities of a lyrical poem could even be intimated until the external matters of metrical form, the infinite varieties of euphony, extending from ruggedness, grandeur, passionate impetuosity, to the softest, smoothest liquidity of sound; the diction, the choice of images, every part of utterance, were related to the specific idea of it. No person in his senses would think of formulating a set of external rules applicable to all lyrical poetry alike, and call it "The Technique of the Lyric."

Why then should the drama alone be petrified? Its appeal must be immediate, compact, and to a certain extent, external. One is more directly conscious of its form than of that of the novel, but, unless confronted with an exceptionally great, or an exceptionally dead, drama, less so than of the form of a lyric. The dramatic form is such an extraordinarily perfect organism, so rich in its manifold co-

ordination, fitness, and power, that it is likely to impress itself upon one's attention as the principal part of a drama. Yet it is really no more detached from the inner qualities of the drama than the lyrical form is from that of the inner significance of the lyric. The impressive character of the external dramatic form is, on the contrary, an indication of a proportionate richness, force, and significance in the characters and ideas embodied in it. The greater the form, the greater should be the specific meaning sustaining it.

The idea implied in the foregoing is that it is impossible to attempt any absolute "Theory of *The Drama*." Such a theory must inevitably be mechanical and trivial, and therefore wrong. One might write a "Technique of a Drama," and possibly, of the dramas of a certain writer, but not of *the drama*. The dramatic form is not a sort of standardized armor to be clapped on any subject, but it must grow with it like the shape of a tree. There are certain general similarities and identities of type, but they are so large and simple they require very little definition. Technique is not in the first place what those who are of the same mind as Aristotle-Freytag regard it, a mere strategic puzzle, planting a man here, concealing one there, insinuating a suggestion here, massing one's forces there; keeping all one's wires in perfect order, and marking every connection and contact in a game of mere skill. That is a very easy and facile thing. But above all, it is a very poor thing. For it ignores the greatest, the vital, part of a drama, the human value of it. The interest and the relaxation of a game, whatever they are, consist, beyond the observation of the few fixed rules of play, in the elimination of all moral decisions from an exertion of skill. In that specializa-

tion lies its limitation. However one may try, one cannot inject a genuine moral value into a mere trial of skill. We may call one pawn in the strategic game of the thesis play this; another, that; we may have kings and queens, bishops, knights, castles, and what not, and may describe them as villains or heroes, good, mediocre, and bad; but these moral attributions do not in any way affect the moves of those men in the game. A villain knight is confined to his erratic course precisely as a noble knight, and the wisest and noblest king at chess could move no less slowly to save the dynasty than a shiftless dawdler. It is in this prison of mechanical narrowness that the futility of the thesis play is begotten. This futility, and not any superiority of intelligence, is the reason that this form of drama, with all its effort of moral seriousness, has never succeeded in the history of the drama, and cannot succeed. This form of play is not, as its adherents fondly proclaim, too intellectual, but too unintelligent; not too true and real, but too starved and unhuman; not too penetrating and serious, but too facile, trivial, and uncomprehending; not too profound, but, on the contrary, too priggish and rigid, too superficial and unimaginative, to touch the main springs of action, passion, and genuine moral conviction.

All the details of the action, the turns in the direction of it, the images, phrases, sounds, and rhythms, the complications, every failure or progress, every climax or catastrophe, must unite in a complete living organism of spontaneous manifestations of character in various relations to environment, in its conflicts, victories and defeats, in growth and decay. How then is it possible to prescribe laws of procedure for all dramas alike unless all characters are alike?

As one comprehends the deeper organic significance of the question of technique, one departs more and more from the simple faith that technique is something to be definitely fixed and mastered as one would learn the use of a complex machine. The technique of an art is inseparable from the comprehension of the substance of it. Any attempt of separation leads to a false simplicity and mock facility, the few specious advantages of which cannot avert the ultimate failure arising from premature satisfaction, misunderstanding, and confusion of values.

The enduring value of Freytag's "Technique" would seem to consist not in the universal validity of the doctrine he represents, but rather in that he has represented a widely tolerated doctrine, in a final, rounded, very concise and methodical manner. His work sums up and codifies practically all that is essential in the development of external dramatic theory from Aristotle to the present. Though he has not given a satisfactory solution, he has defined, conveniently and authoritatively, all the formal elements of the dramatic structure. And that is a very important service, indeed. The permanence of many great theoretic essays lies not in the answers, but in the definitions and statements of the questions proposed in them. It consists in establishing a permanent basis for the departure of a new age.

Freytag himself was far from dogmatic. He never assumed that he had discovered final solutions. He had occasion shortly before his death to give a singularly pathetic and attractive proof of his generous openness of mind, under conditions that would have been trying to anyone of a doctrinaire disposition. When Hauptmann's "Hannele's Himmelsfahrt" appeared, Freytag wrote a review of it full of sympathetic appreciation. One can fully understand the

spirit of this act only if one bears in mind the uncompromising attitude of the naturalistic movement in Germany towards the preceding generation, and the complete abandonment of its old gods by the literary public opinion of that day.

MARTIN SCHÜTZE.

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